



Department of
Veterans Affairs

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State Summary

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New York and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- **General:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers a wide variety of programs and services for the nation's 24.7 million veterans. In 2004, more than 5 million people were treated in VA health-care facilities, 3.5 million veterans and survivors received VA disability compensation or pensions, 490,397 used GI Bill education benefits and more than 2.5 million owned homes purchased with GI Bill home loan benefits. About 93,000 veterans and family members were buried in VA's national cemeteries and 349,000 headstones and markers were provided for veterans' graves worldwide.

VA spent more than \$3.16 billion in New York in 2004 to care for nearly 1.2 million veterans who live in the state. Last year, 253,567 people received health care and 144,591 veterans and survivors received disability compensation or pension payments from VA in New York. More than 14,255 veterans, reservists or survivors used GI Bill payments for their education, 43,756 owned homes with active VA home loan guarantees and 10,074 were interred in six national cemeteries.

- **Health Care:** One of the most visible of all VA benefits is health care. VA has 157 hospitals, 869 ambulatory care and community-based outpatient clinics, 207 Vet Centers, 134 nursing homes, 42 residential rehabilitation treatment programs and 92 comprehensive home care programs. Due to technology and national and VA health care trends, VA has changed from a hospital-based system to a primarily outpatient-focused system over the past eight years.

VA has two health care networks in New York -- the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York and the VA New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network. They operate 12 major medical centers in New York, plus an extended care center at St. Albans. In fiscal year 2004, VA facilities in New York had 31,072 inpatient admissions and provided 2,945,434 outpatient visits.

The VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York is comprised of the Albany, Batavia, Bath, Buffalo, Canandaigua and Syracuse VA medical centers and 29 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). In fiscal year 2004, the network had 13,283 inpatient admissions and 1,393,432 outpatient visits.

The VA New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network has medical centers in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Castle Point, Montrose, Manhattan and Northport. In fiscal year 2004, they had 17,789 inpatient admissions and 1,552,002 outpatient visits.

These facilities provide a full range of medical services, including acute medical, surgical, psychiatric and nursing home care. Specialty units at select medical centers offer cardiac catheterization, lithotripsy, clinical pharmacology, MRI, radiation therapy, women's health programs, treatment for spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder and blind rehabilitation.

The medical centers are augmented by more than 60 outpatient clinics throughout the state. These clinics offer a full array of primary care services for veterans in the communities where they live and work, especially in rural areas. Each medical facility is affiliated with at least one major university and together each year they provide training for more than 8,000 medical students and residents in nursing, dentistry, dietetics, audiology and speech pathology, medical technology, radiation technology, pharmacy, podiatry, psychology, physical and occupational therapy, and social work.

The Manhattan and Brooklyn medical centers have been recognized for having four clinical programs of excellence -- in renal dialysis, cardiac surgery, comprehensive medical rehabilitation and HIV care.

- **Geriatric Care:** Long-term care is a critical issue for America's veterans. Approximately 38 percent of living veterans are at least 65 years, compared with 13 percent of the general population. The challenge to care for these 9.6 million men and women is met through a spectrum of home and community-based programs such as home-based primary care, homemaker and home health aide services, home respite and hospice and adult day care health. VA also provides home and domiciliary care for veterans who can no longer be safely maintained in non-institutional settings. Additionally, VA conducts nationwide research on the causes and treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and funds 21 geriatric research, education and clinical centers, each focusing on a major geriatric problem.

In New York, more than 135,000 people over the age of 65 received health care last year from VA. Besides the multitude of general health care programs available to all veterans, New York's medical centers operate numerous nursing home care units across the state. All the nursing home care programs are supported by respite care, adult day health care, home-based primary care and contract nursing homes. VA tries to keep veterans in their homes and independent for as long as possible. A research grant will study the effects of support groups on spouses providing care to frail and elderly mates.

At the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York, all community care options for geriatrics include Home Based Primary Care (HBPC). That care has been available at all our medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics for more than six years. The network has the second-largest deployment of telemedicine equipment and telemonitoring care units in the country. VA facilities in New York are leaders in early identification of patients with Alzheimer's disease. Dementia care managers are at each medical center in the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York. New York VA health care facilities also have combined hospice and palliative care resources and have formed a state hospice veterans partnership with the Hospice and Palliative Care Association with New York State (HPCANYS) and the New Jersey Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NJHPCO).

The VA New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network operates a Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), which combines academic and research medicine with state-of-the-art clinical care in an environment designed to foster collaboration among different disciplines of health providers. GRECCs serve as a learning laboratory with a patient orientation and contribute significantly to improved use of research findings in the care of the elderly.

- **Research:** To provide the highest quality of health care to the nation's veterans, VA sponsors a world-renowned research and development program that addresses some of the most difficult challenges facing medical science today, such as aging, vision loss, women's health, Gulf War illnesses, diabetes, bioterrorism and hepatitis. VA researchers led the way in developing the cardiac pacemaker, the CT scan, magnetic source imaging and improving artificial limbs. More recently, injuries sustained by armed forces engaged in current deployments have further increased the long-standing emphasis on VA research on limb loss; prosthetics and tissue replacement; traumatic brain injury; spinal cord injury; and mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder. The quality of the research and relevance to the veteran population remain the determining factors in deciding what studies to fund.

VA has an extensive research program in New York. In the VA New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network alone, the research budget is \$14 million for 40 research projects. In the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York research is conducted at Albany, Syracuse and Buffalo VA medical centers.

At the Albany medical center, projects include research into Gulf War illness, prostate cancer, chronocology, prostate hypertrophy and the basic science program.

The Health Services Research & Development Program includes research on health education programs for individuals and their caregivers with advanced illness, improving the care of patients with Alzheimer's disease, and improving end-of-life care in patients with life threatening illnesses such as cancer and congestive heart failure.

The Syracuse medical center is involved in a wide variety of hematology and oncology research, with special emphasis on cancers of the breast, lung and prostate. Also included in the Syracuse research portfolio is infectious disease studies (e.g. hepatitis C, community acquired pneumonia, and tuberculosis). Within the biomedical laboratory research program at Syracuse are studies on visual processing and the effects of alcohol on the human brain.

The VA Western New York Healthcare System has more than 200 research projects, more than 70 principal investigators and a budget of \$4.2 million, which includes research in cancer, pulmonary disorders, chronic infectious disease, dementia and other neurological disorders.

The Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) provides cutting edge research into mental illness. Additionally, the Bronx, Hudson Valley and New Jersey facilities operate three unique programs for the treatment and care of spinal cord injured veterans. Working collaboratively with the United Spinal Association these

programs are continuously fine-tuned to best meet the needs of these very special patients.

Medical centers throughout the state are affiliated with renowned universities and metropolitan area-medical schools such as New York University, Mount Sinai, and State University of New York, Downstate and Stony Brook.

VA's Center for Integrated Health Care is a recently funded research center that provides educational and research projects to improve the coordination of mental and physical health care. The center grant is \$1.8 million per year for five years beginning in 2005. VA has been a leader in integrating mental health clinicians into every primary care and community-based outpatient clinic to make sure veterans have equal access to mental and physical health care service. The new center will build on these programs to further develop the types of care that can be delivered in a primary care clinic.

- **Disabilities and Pensions:** Not all military service related issues end when people are discharged from active duty. About 2.6 million veterans receive monthly VA disability compensation for medical conditions related to their service in uniform. VA pensions go to about 338,000 wartime veterans with limited means. Family members of about 530,000 veterans qualify for monthly VA payments as the survivors of disabled veterans or pension recipients.

VA regional offices in Buffalo and New York City serve veterans and their survivors in New York who are seeking VA financial benefits. In fiscal year 2004, these offices processed 19,309 disability compensation claims. The total includes 5,280 veterans applying for the first time for disability compensation. During fiscal year 2004, these offices acted on 14,029 cases where veterans reopened a claim, usually to seek an increase in their disability rating level for higher payments.

- **Homeless:** Nearly 23 percent of homeless adults are veterans, and many more veterans who live in poverty are at risk of becoming homeless. VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to the homeless. It has the largest network of homeless assistance programs in the country. More than 10,000 transitional housing units and 2,000 permanent beds case managed by VA staff are available for homeless veterans throughout the country. VA aggressively reaches out to veterans on the street, conducts clinical assessments, offers needed medical treatment, and provides long-term shelters and job training. More than \$200 million is dedicated to specialized homeless programs to assist homeless veterans, including grants and per diem payments to more than 300 public groups.

VA provides extensive programs for homeless veterans in New York, with a homeless veteran coordinator at every medical center. VA's homeless programs coordinate with shelters, community organizations and local governments to provide care and referral services to veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In the New York metropolitan area, the Consortium on Homeless Veterans received the Public Employees Roundtable Public Service Excellence Award in the federal category. The Network Consortium for Homeless Veterans was recognized for excellence in providing innovative, cost-effective service partnerships between VA and the New York and New Jersey metropolitan area community in providing a seamless

continuum of care for homeless veterans. It has become a national model for the planning, coordination and integration of such programs.

VA estimates that there may be as many as 12,000 homeless veterans in New York City, about one-third of the total number of homeless adults.

- **Memorial Affairs:** Most men and women who have been in the military are eligible for burial in a national cemetery, as are their dependent children and usually their spouses. VA manages the country's network of national cemeteries with more than 2.6 million gravesites at 121 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, as well as in 33 soldier's lots and monument sites. Last year, 93,000 veterans were buried in VA's national cemeteries. Additionally, in 2004, VA provided nearly 349,000 headstones and markers and 435,000 Presidential Memorial Certificates to the loved ones of deceased veterans. VA-assisted state veterans cemeteries provided more than 19,000 interments.

VA has six national cemeteries in New York. In 2004, Calverton National Cemetery had 7,162 burials. Cypress Hills National Cemetery, in Brooklyn, Woodlawn National Cemetery, Elmira, and Long Island National Cemetery now bury only eligible family members. Cypress Hills had four interments last year, Woodlawn buried 59 people and Long Island buried 1,759. Solomon-Saratoga National Cemetery, in Schuylerville, had 837 burials. Bath National Cemetery had 253 burials. VA provided 19,408 headstones and markers for the graves of veterans in New York. In 2004, Presidential Memorial Certificates were sent to 12,729 New York survivors of veterans.

For additional state summaries see: <http://www.va.gov/opa/fact/statesum/index.htm>.

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